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ABSTRACT

Two methods for enhancing the job interviewing skills of rehabilitation clients were studied: the MDC Quest Series (a slide-tape program produced by the Materials Development Center at the University of Wisconsin-Stout) and group role playing. Forty clients were assigned in a 2 x 2 (presence or absence of role play by presence or absence of Quest) experimental design to determine the individual and joint contributions of the two methods. Main effect findings revealed that both role play and Quest methods may show promise in raising clients' interview competency. (Author/EM)

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Job Interviewing Skills Training: An Empirical Investigation of Two Methods

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Abstract

Two methods for enhancing the job interviewing skills of rehabilitation clients were studied: the MDC Job Quest Series (#3) and group role playing. Forty clients were assigned in a 2 x 2 (presence or absence of role play by presence or absence of Quest) experimental design, to study the individual and joint contributions of the two methods. Main effect findings revealed that both role play and Quest methods may show promise in raising clients' interview competency. Suggestions for further research are elaborated.

Job Interviewing Skills Training: An Empirical Investigation of Two Methods

In spite of a dismal history of reliability findings (Hakel, Dobmeyer & Dunnette,1970), the employment interview is a component of the job seeking process which is of central importance. In a recent polling of some 2500 employers by Prentice-Hall Publishing Company and the American Society for Personnel Administration (1975), the evaluation interview was designated as the single most important employee selection criterion, followed respectively by prior work experience, references, and educational background.

Many clients in rehabilitation settings have numerous employability handicaps in their disfavor at the outset of the job seeking process (lack of marketable skills, poor employment record, employer misconceptions about the candidate's disability, etc.). Hakel et al. (1970) reiterated a number of findings suggesting how often interviewers form an early negative impression of the client, spending the balance of the interview looking for evidence to support it. The Advisory Council for Technical-Vocational Education (1975) in Texas compiled a list of employee qualities which were frequently cited for rejecting job applicants after the interview. Few of the reasons listed were relevant to the applicant's ability to carry out the essential work tasks; rather such factors as inadequate communication skills, poor appearance, inappropriate

behavior and mannerisms emerged as being crucial in the hiring decision. It would appear that such deficits might be remediated through a job interviewing skills training program. The purpose of this study was to determine the effectiveness of two remedial methods: role playing, and one component of a commercially available training package, the MDC Job Quest Series.

The use of role playing as a training technique in developing job seeking competence in rehabilitation clients has an impressive literature (Azrin, Flores & Kaplan, 1977; Barbee & Keil, 1973; Brandzel, 1963; Keil & Barbee, 1973; Perrin, 1977; Prazak, 1969; Sarason & Ganzer, 1973; Stude & Pauls, 1977). Role playing provides the client with a vehicle to practice interviewing skills in a mock interview before interviewing with a real employer. The use of videotaped or live models, feedback from group leaders and other group members, and the use of "instant replays" with videotape equipment all can enhance the potence of this technique in enabling clients to overcome the cognitive and behavioral stumbling blocks to successful job interviewing.

The MDC Job Quest Series*, produced by the Materials Development Center of Menomonie, Wisconsin, is an audio-visual (tape cassette accompanying a slide carousel) program in use

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* Information may be obtained from: Materials Development Center, Department of Rehabilitation and Manpower Services, University of Wisconsin-Stout, Menomonie, WI 54751

by many rehabilitation agencies. As far as we could determine, the program has never been formally evaluated for its effectiveness. In this study on enhancing client's interviewing skills, only Part 3 of Quest ("Interviewing for a Job") was examined. The presentation concentrates on some of the points which sell an interviewee to a prospective employer. It includes steps which prepare a person for an interview, including ways of handling problem questions which often arise in job interviews with disabled interviewees. Points emphasized during the program include the two-way nature of the decision process occurring during an employment interview, appropriate interview behaviors and tactics, the importance of grooming, business manners, and the appropriate way to deal with problem questions about disability and background. The emphasis on problem questions is that of a positive approach by clients which includes the ability to describe their disability in a concise, believable manner.

Our research interests, then, were two-fold. First, is the MDC Quest "Interviewing for a Job" program as effective as role playing as a training technique? Secondly, can the effectiveness of role playing be enhanced by the addition of the Quest program to role play training? A 2 x 2 (presence or absence of Quest x presence or absence of role play training) design was selected as the effects of each technique could be assessed alone and in combination, with a control group in the no treatment cell.

Method

Subjects

Forty clients (31 males and 9 females) from a large midwestern rehabilitation facility volunteered to serve as subjects for the study when informed that the investigators were experimenting with ways to help them improve their ability to find employment. The subjects ranged in age from 18 to 57 years with a mean age of 32.5. Primary disabilities of the subjects were varied and included mild mental retardation, back injury, alcoholism, epilepsy, cerebral palsy, and impaired hearing. All clients were enrolled in work training programs but none had received any prior training in job placement or interviewing.

Procedures

The subjects were randomly assigned in equal number (n = 10) to one of four treatment conditions:

Group I - Role Play and Quest training

Group II - Quest training only

Group III - Role Play training only

Group IV - Control

The group assigned to the cell receiving neither treatment (Group IV) formed a delayed treatment control group; it was determined that they would receive whichever treatment demonstrated maximum effectiveness following data analysis. Some minor adjustments to random assignment were necessitated by

client schedule conflicts; thus males and females were not proportionately represented in the four conditions, though both sexes were represented in all treatments.

With the exception of Group IV, subjects participated in three one-hour training sessions. Training was conducted in more manageable subgroups of 4-6 trainees. During the first session, trainees met with one of the experimenters to discuss vocational aspirations, skills needed for different occupations, and individual recognition of what skills each group member possessed. (This initial session was the only meeting for Group IV during the training phase of the experiment. The same experimenter met with all groups during all sessions.)

The second session was identical for Groups I and II. The session began with the audiovisual presentation of Quest #3, which consisted of a series of 65 slides accompanied by a taped narrative lasting 20 minutes. After the presentation, discussion was generated around its salient points: appearance, eye contact, enthusiasm for the job, answering questions directly, positively presenting skills, and demonstrating appropriate closure.

In the second meeting of Group III, role playing a job interview was introduced as a means by which each subject is given a chance to practice interviewing skills in a mock interview before interviewing with a real employer. With the experimenter serving as interviewer, each subject practiced interviewing for a job for which s/he was planning to apply

after completing training at the facility. The other group members watched each role played interview and provided feedback on the interviewee's performance.

The third training session was used to provide role play training for Group I using the same protocol that had been used with Group III in the previous session. Group II subjects reviewed the important points for a good job interview presented during the Quest presentation and engaged in further brainstorming on coping with problem questions. Group III (role play training only) continued role playing, and giving and receiving feedback on interview skills.

After all training was completed, all 40 subjects participated in a simulated employment interview which was videotaped. The interviewer was an experienced staff member in the facility who was not informed of the nature of the study, experimental hypotheses, and subjects' treatment conditions. The order of the videotaped interviews was randomized.

Measures

Two judges (one male and one female graduate student in rehabilitation counseling) viewed each of the videotaped subject interviews. They were not aware of any training procedures or experimental hypotheses at the time of viewing. Two dependent variables were obtained for each subject. First, each of

the two judges completed a rating scale* on interview skill level comprised of items selected from the literature and the objectives of the MDC Job Quest Series. A total score was calculated from the rating scale. The judges also assigned a "probability of hire" score (ranging from 0 to 100) based on a global assessment of the quality of that subject's interview behavior. For each dependent variable, the subject's assigned score was the mean of the two judges' independent scores.

Results

A summary of means and standard deviations is presented for both dependent variables in Table 1. Both cell and marginal (main effect) data are included.

Insert Table 1 about here

A 2 x 2 analysis of variance was conducted. Although no significant Role play x Quest interactions existed, some interesting main effects did emerge. For the "probability of hire" variable, subjects who received role play training (Groups I and III) fared significantly better than those without $[F(1,36) = 7.71, p \leq .008]$. No statistically significant difference was evident between subjects who did or did

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* The rating scale may be obtained from the first author: U.W.M. - Department of Educational Psychology, P.O. Box 413, Milwaukee, WI 53201.

not receive the Quest interviewing skills program [$F(1,36) = 1.87$, $p \leq .177$].

For the judges' ratings of the subjects' videotaped interview simulations, both role play and Quest factors showed significant main effects in the appropriate direction [role play - $F(1,36) = 13.27$, $p \leq .001$; Quest - $F(1,36) = 8.31$, $p \leq .007$].

Discussion

While the lack of significance of the interaction of the treatment factors mitigates against analyzing individual cell differences, "data snooping" showed two points of interest: that the control group gave the poorest showing on both dependent variables, and the addition of Quest training to role play provided virtually no enhancement of role play's effectiveness. Certainly our findings on the effectiveness of role playing as a training modality are consistent with those of previous investigators.

With the present emphasis in rehabilitation programming on placement, these findings may present some timely suggestions. We would urge that role play training be incorporated into job seeking skills programs. Clients who learn assertiveness and self-confidence through learning specific interviewing skills are potentially better prepared for actual interviews when they begin to seek employment. Furthermore, we recommend that training be conducted in groups, because of cost efficiency, practicality, and the benefits of group members' feedback which frequently means more than the leader's comments.

The real validity of these suggestions, of course, will remain questionable until further research can replicate and extend our findings. One methodological issue needs to be addressed as well. Because of limited personnel and funds, the principal trainer for the Quest and role play procedures was one of the experimenters. The potential for bias and demand factors, while probably quite small in this case, do nevertheless exist and must be acknowledged. Every effort was made to minimize these, e.g. standardized presentations of the training materials, and use of blind raters to obtain the dependent measures. Where feasible, alternative approaches should probably be considered.

The course of future studies might advisably be in the direction of examining more comprehensive employability skills (e.g., conducting the whole job campaign, as opposed to focusing only on a component skill such as interviewing), and generating more "in vivo" dependent variables such as actual clients hiring rates rather than laboratory probability estimates.

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Table 1

Means and Standard Deviations of Both Dependent Variables in Each Treatment Condition

Treatment Condition	Rating Scale		Probability of Hire	
	$\bar{X}$	S.D.	$\bar{X}$	S.D.
Role Play & Quest (I)	26.50	3.20	71.70	20.94
Quest Only (II)	24.55	2.88	64.90	14.11
Role Play Only (III)	25.28	2.83	73.10	17.53
Control (IV)	20.28	3.15	47.60	20.21
Quest (Main Effect)				
Groups I & II	25.53	3.04	68.30	17.85
Groups III & IV	22.78	2.99	60.35	18.92
Role Play (Main Effect)				
Groups I & III	25.89	3.02	72.10	19.31
Groups II & IV	22.42	3.02	56.25	17.43